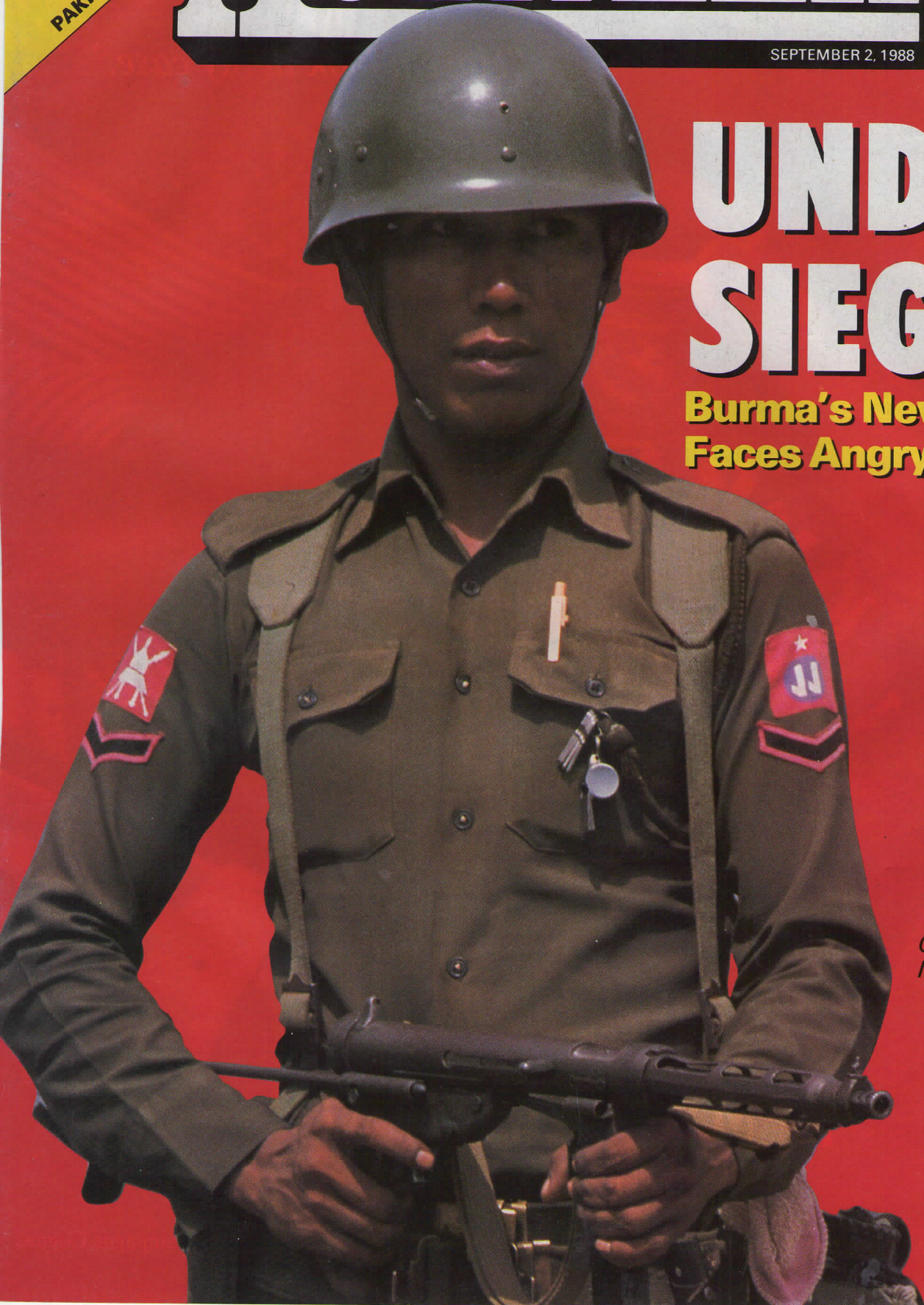


NA...
\$3.00
IN CENTS
PAKISTAN WITHOUT ZIA

ASIAWEEK

SEPTEMBER 2, 1988

AUSTRALIA: A\$3.00
BANGLADESH: Taka35
BRUNEI: B\$4.00
BURMA: K\$8.00
CANADA: C\$4.50
CHINA: US\$2.50
FIJI: F\$3.00
HONG KONG: HK\$17.00
INDIA: Re23
INDONESIA: Rp2750
JAPAN: Y850
KOREA: Won1900
MALAYSIA: M\$4.50
NEPAL: N\$25
NEW ZEALAND: NZ\$4.00
PAKISTAN: Re22
PAPUA N.G.: K\$3.00
PHILIPPINES: P\$30.00
SAUDI ARABIA: SR11
SINGAPORE: S\$4.00
SRI LANKA: Re40
TAIWAN: N.T.\$80
THAILAND: B\$5
U.K.: £2.00
U.S.A.: US\$4.00



UNDER SIEGE

**Burma's New Leader
Faces Angry Protests**

*On Guard
In Rangoon*



Setting up barricades in Rangoon: For the protestors, replacing Sein Lwin with Maung Maung was not enough

Alain Evrard — Asiaweek

BURMA

The Pressure Builds

Hundreds of dying and wounded crowded the open wards and balconies of the Rangoon General Hospital, a sprawling colonial-style building in the heart of the Burmese capital. The bandages on many patients were encrusted in blood; there were not enough rolls to dress their wounds again. Relatives sat helplessly at the bedsides of loved ones grimacing in pain; anaesthetising drugs were running out. Lying quietly on one bed was a boy, his groin blown off by a bullet. Most of the injured around him were also youthful. They were among the lucky survivors of the mayhem of Aug. 8-12, when rifle-toting soldiers fired on the crowds of students, monks and workers who took to the streets demanding democracy and economic reform. Outside the hos-

pital, the protests continued. Some 5,000 people had congregated within the concrete walls of the hospital compound. Many more had climbed on to the roof to hear the speakers below. Each time army trucks trundled past the building, people looked apprehensively towards the road.

It was Aug. 20, the day after Attorney-General Maung Maung had been named as Burma's new president and chairman of the ruling Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP). Compared with Sein Lwin, the strongman who was forced by public fury to quit on Aug. 12 after only eighteen days in power, Maung Maung was a moderate. He was also the sole civilian in the BSPP central committee. People had dubbed Sein Lwin "the Butcher" for his brutal suppression of earlier uprisings.

The worst nickname given to the new leader was "Puppet" because of his close affiliation with Ne Win, the autocrat who ruled Burma for 26 years before his surprise resignation in July. Yet, to the agitators who had confronted armed troops with nothing more than homemade weapons and anger, replacing Sein Lwin with Maung Maung was not enough. His appointment fell far short of their demand for an end to totalitarianism.

Disappointed, they flocked to hear dissident speeches at the Rangoon General Hospital, which became the focal point of popular protest. One masked monk began a diatribe against the government, then halfway through whipped off the handkerchief covering his face as the crowd cheered. Speaker after speaker pointed out

that in his first address to the nation, the new leader had offered no hope for greater political freedom. "Either the government just doesn't understand or it does and is trying to outface the situation," noted one Western diplomat in Bangkok. "The people are not clamouring for a new leader but a system which will be able to produce able leaders." Concurred a Burma watcher: "They won't be happy until this organ, the BSPP, is dissolved."

The words were prophetic. Not long after Maung Maung's accession, protests again flared across the country: from Tavoy in the south to Taunggyi and Mandalay in the north. On Aug. 23, the second consecutive day of demonstrations, more than 250,000 people paraded through Mandalay while another 200,000 marched in Tavoy. Reports said civil administration in the two cities was breaking down, with Buddhist monks and students taking over. The day before, thousands had reportedly come from Mandalay and Tavoy, as well as from Yenangyaung and Pegu to join a rally in Rangoon. The procession from Yenangyaung was particularly symbolic: a half-century ago, Burmese workers from the northern city had marched to Rangoon in a protest against British colonial rule. Last week's agitators came on foot or in jeeps, cars and trucks, but were turned away at barricades by troops who had sealed off the capital.

Despite the northerners' absence, the crowds that milled through the streets of Rangoon on Aug. 22 were several thousand strong; next day their numbers had swollen to at least 100,000. For the first time, the processions included the country's non-official élite — white-robed doctors, lawyers in collars, well-known singers, actors and writers, as well as prominent Muslim and Buddhist leaders. Witnesses said the mood was festive and good-humoured. Marchers alternately sang the national anthem and chanted "strike, strike" as they marched beneath banners proclaiming, "We want nothing but democracy." Sometimes they stopped to chat with the soldiers who stood warily nearby but did not interfere.

There was little suggestion of the fear and anger of the Aug. 8-12 street protests, which had led to Sein Lwin's ouster and to an estimated toll of well over 1,000 lives. By contrast, last week's demonstrations were largely peaceful, although there were reports of soldiers shooting marchers in the eastern city of Moulmein and in Tatkon, 380 km north of Rangoon. The state-run radio said protestors led by red-robed Buddhist monks had attacked and looted a customs building in Moulmein. Martial law, imposed on Rangoon three weeks earlier, was lifted on Aug. 24.

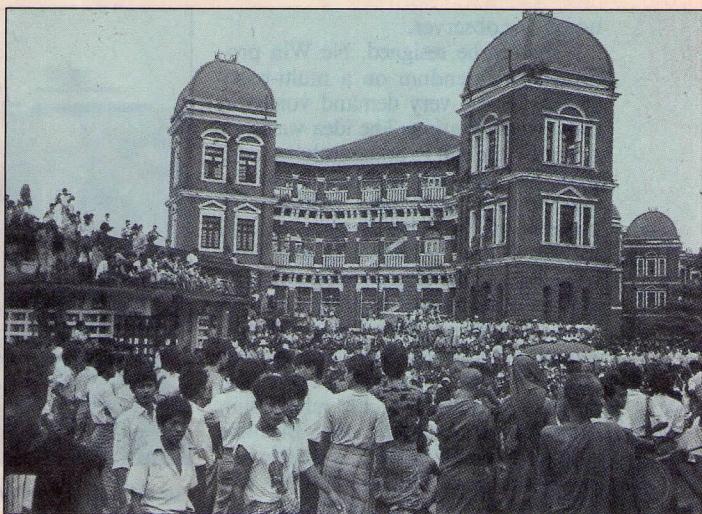
Although Maung Maung, 63, talked in his maiden address of extinguishing "the

fire of anger with the cool waters of love," that was easier said than done. The concessions offered by the BSPP were limited: civilian leadership, a relaxing of economic restrictions and the setting up of an eleven-man commission of inquiry into the protestors' grievances. Hopes for political restructuring, however, were firmly quashed by the new leader on the grounds that the 1974 Constitution, which provided for exclusive rule by the BSPP, had been endorsed at the time by a referendum. "We can't ignore the bitter results of this system," said one youthful protestor, "so we will fight for change."

Public discontent was also stoked by a strongly worded statement by Suu Kyi, the daughter of Burma's founding father, Aung San. London-based Suu Kyi, who was in Rangoon to visit her aged mother, proposed setting up an independent people's consultative committee of non-BSPP members which would bring in a multi-party system. Her plan was somewhat similar to one proposed by the students in a recent letter to the BSPP central committee. They called for a caretaker government for a one-year period to provide conditions for democracy, including freedom of the press. After some time in the interim period, suggested the letter, a constituent assembly would be held to write a new constitution.



Wounded youth: Few supplies



Rangoon General Hospital, Aug. 18: "Democracy"

To many Burmese, Maung Maung's appointment was a gesture of small significance. They believed that Ne Win, despite his resignation as party chairman, still held sway over the BSPP and over his onetime aide and biographer Maung Maung ("maung" means younger brother in Burmese). Although he has the most distinguished law career in the country, Burma's new president owed his swift elevation within BSPP ranks to Ne Win, the 77-year-old strongman who currently lives along Rangoon's Inya Lake in a luxurious villa heavily guarded by troops. A helicopter, its engine idling, is said to stand near the house ready for take-off anytime.

Maung Maung studied law in Britain and lectured at Yale. He was appointed chief justice by Ne Win in 1962, not long after the military strongman overthrew Prime Minister U Nu in a coup. Maung Maung wrote the 1974 Constitution which formalised Ne Win's "Burmese Way to Socialism," an amalgam of militarism, Buddhism and socialism. Elected to the BSPP central committee in 1976, he was fifth in the party hierarchy at his resignation in 1985. Ne Win's sudden departure on July 23 was followed by a series of shuffles within the cabinet and party ranks. Maung Maung returned to the central committee and was named Burma's Attorney-General.

With his keen legal mind, observers said Maung Maung would be the ideal person to rewrite the Constitution to loosen economic controls. The party approved a plethora of economic reforms when Sein Lwin took over and analysts contended that the government had little choice but to implement them as swiftly as possible. Politics, however, was an entirely different matter. Burma experts said Maung Maung would not attempt any restructuring without directions from his mentor. "He has the mental equipment but can't do anything without the blessing of Ne Win,"

noted one observer.

Before he resigned, Ne Win proposed a referendum on a multi-party system — the very demand voiced in the recent agitation. The idea was shot down by the BSPP, apparently because party members had no intention of giving up any of their considerable powers. Maung Maung was expected to take over as president at that time, while Sein Lwin led the party. Analysts are divided on what happened behind the scenes. Some believe that Ne Win himself orchestrated Sein Lwin's installation in both posts and the rejection by party members of his referendum proposal. Elaborated one Burmese source: "Maung Maung is devoted to Ne Win and will step down if Ne Win tells him to. Ne Win will step in as a saviour and immediately announce a multi-party system. No one will then be able to criticise Ne Win while he gracefully exits from politics."

If such a scenario were to take place, who would provide the best alternative to Ne Win? Observers reckoned there was no recognisable person with the ability to draw mass support, except perhaps for Aung Gyi, Ne Win's former lieutenant who last week was still languishing in a Rangoon jail. Aung Gyi's open letters to Ne Win urging political reform were circulated in Burma over the past few months



Ne Win (l.) and Maung Maung (behind, r.)
Wang Jingde — Xinhua

and helped trigger public ire against the régime. In recent weeks, posters on Rangoon walls have called for the return to Burma of Aung San Oo, the son of freedom fighter Aung San. Said to be working at the U.N. headquarters in New York, Aung San Oo was reportedly denied a visa to return home. Some also mentioned the name of U Nu, the venerable ex-premier who last week offered to mediate between the military-dominated government and student agitators.

Indeed, students have again emerged

as a formidable force in Burma. Hundreds of underground student groups exist all over Burma, in defiance of a ban on student unions following an uprising at Rangoon University in the mid-1970s. Observers point out that the students were able to spearhead the recent movement for democracy because they were the most mobile group in a society riddled by thousands of government informers. The illegal student unions have a relatively well-developed communication network, maintaining contact with one another through envoys.

Meetings among leaders are held in emergency situations. Student bigwigs from all over the country got together secretly on Aug. 16 to plan further agitation and lay down a goal for the movement. "We don't have any one big organisation," said one leader, "but we have common ends." For them, the ouster of Sein Lwin was only a small victory. The battle for democracy still lay ahead. To achieve that end, said some student leaders, they would even make a marriage of convenience with rebel insurgents (see box, p. 25). "The students will keep the pot warm," noted one observer. "They will not let it cool." A poster outside Rangoon General Hospital put the youngsters' determination more grimly. It said: "We will fight to the last drop of blood." ■



Rohingyas, Bangladesh: Waiting to go back to Burma
Tahmina Ahmad — Asiaweek

MINORITIES

Watch from the Border

The Rohingyas are an odd-minority-out. Descendants of Arabs, Turks, Pushtuns and other Muslims who settled in the old kingdom of Arakan, they form a small Islamic community in their predominantly Buddhist homeland, long part of Burma. Over the past two decades, they claim, they have been persecuted by both local and Rangoon authorities. They blame government armed campaigns against them, particularly one in 1978 which they refer to as the King Dragon Operation, for forcing many of them over the frontier into Muslim Bangladesh. Some 200,000 Rohingyas have taken refuge there

and some have set up anti-Rangoon groups to fight for self-determination.

They welcomed the news of the nationwide uprising in Burma. "We Rohingyas have been waiting a long time for this moment in history," Mohammad Umrah, a prominent member of the refugee community in border town Teknaf told Correspondent Tahmina Ahmad. "It is time to go and join the students and fight for the re-establishment of democracy." Rohingya student leader N.A. Murshed of Cox's Bazaar, another frontier post, said that some soldiers were planning to go back to join the movement for democracy. There are no signs that many have gone yet — perhaps partly because Rangoon is more than 600 km off over bad roads.

Burma's unrest has had little effect on the short (170 km) border with Bangladesh. There has been no new exodus, according to 70-year-old Rohingya Syed Alam, who monitors the refugee population for the Bangladesh government. The only sign of change is a livening of the black market, where Arakanese trade livestock, betel products, coconuts, shrimps and rice for manufactured items like dried milk, medicines and clothes. Now, say local Bangladesh officials, much more rice has been coming out of Burma as the authorities lose their grip over the tightly-controlled trade. Demand for consumer goods going the other way has shot up at the same time and Rohingyas are said by Teknaf folk to be doing a brisk trade in dried and condensed milk.

The main worry of the Rohingyas recently has been a refugee census carried out by Bangladesh authorities. The exercise was begun a while ago but abandoned. Then last month it was taken up again and quickly completed. The fear was that it heralded a pushback into Burma. That, clearly, is not what the Rohingyas want, for the time being at least. ■

REBELS

A Wait-and-See Attitude

In the past few months, Burma's unpopular, totalitarian régime has been the target of public fury. Braving bayonets and bullets, students, workers, Buddhist monks and ordinary folk rioted in the streets for greater political freedom. On Aug. 12, the day that newly appointed strongman Sein Lwin abruptly resigned, Brang Seng, leader of the rebel Kachin Independence Army (KIA) called for a nationwide offensive against the Burmese government. Reports said soldiers of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) were also poised to attack towns in eastern Burma. Both groups belong to the anti-Rangoon National Democratic Front (NDF), a loose umbrella organisation comprising ten armed Burmese minorities which operate along the borders. As unrest swept the country, Burma-watchers wondered if the insurgents would strike.

The rebels did not seem to be seizing the opportunity, however. Part of the reason was the timing of the turmoil. July, August and September are the high monsoon months, when torrential rains make communication and movement in the forested border terrain virtually impossible. During this season, Rangoon troop deployments along rebel fronts are usually significantly reduced, sometimes by as much as 50%. Indeed, the régime in recent weeks had more military manpower at its disposal for maintaining law and order than would have been possible at any other time of the year.

The wet season also brings other problems for the rebels. In theory, they use the lull in fighting for training. In practice, many are seriously debilitated by recurring bouts of malaria, which is particularly vicious along the Thai-Burmese border. Last week, the beds at a hospital at Manaplaw, a frontier post 500 km northwest of Bangkok and a centre for Karen nationalists, were full of malaria patients on drips. Feverish rebel soldiers with less acute attacks lay miserably on the floor. Neither Manaplaw nor any of the other rebel areas can afford preventive medicine or spraying to kill mosquito larvae.

Some analysts reckoned, however, that the rebels' apathy and lack of cohesion were greater impediments than rain or malaria to an offensive on Rangoon. Although NDF general secretary Khine Soe Naing Aung said vaguely that the organisation "does have contact with the students," its response to the current unrest has been limited mainly to pamphleteering and press releases. "Due to a lack of inside information, our leadership probably did not expect the situation to develop to such an extent," admitted one Karen. "We are taking our time. It's a wait-and-see attitude." Bo Mya, the venerable president of the Karen National Union (KNU) echoed that view. "The recent uprisings were good for the people," he said, "but we cannot yet say it will be directly beneficial to the

revolutionaries."

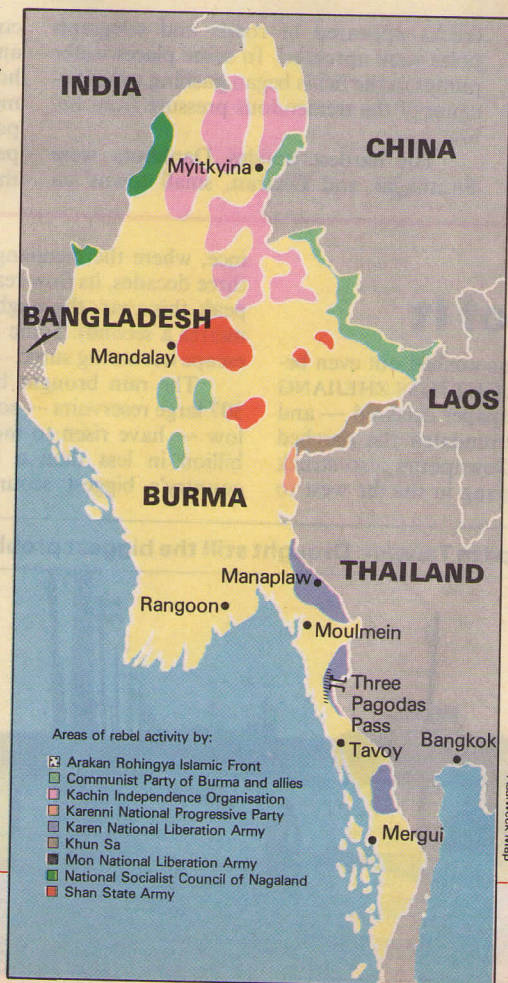
The NDF said it issued a directive in early June to member groups to step up insurgent activities wherever possible. It said few outsiders had heard of the skirmishes because they occurred deep in the interior. The KNLA maintained it had inflicted heavy casualties on government forces in the north, in the area between the Salween and Sataing rivers where fighting was said to be continuing last week. According to KNU leader Bo Mya, small groups of Karen saboteurs dispatched to Rangoon, Moulmein, Mergui and Tavoy had achieved "some success."

The rebel efforts to capitalise on Rangoon's troubles, however, were not helped by infighting within the NDF. Hostilities erupted last month between Mon and Karen guerillas at Three Pagodas Pass, a historic Thai-Burmese frontier point some 280 km northwest of Bangkok and a major centre for smuggling. The Karens pounded Mon-controlled areas near the pass with mortars and rocket-propelled grenades. About 100 soldiers and civilians were reported killed or injured in the first two weeks of battle alone.

Analysts in Bangkok say the conflict was triggered by a dispute over the lucrative black market trade in Three Pagodas Village. Tensions began building up in March when Karen guerillas tried to wrest the village's business centre from the Mon National Liberation Army. Bo Mya claims the Karens used to control the area and had only allowed the MNLA a foothold at the pass to enable it to build up its strength. But over the years, he said, the Mons had become increasingly autonomous. One Mon source said the Karen aggression violated an agreement reached earlier this year between Bo Mya and MNLA vice president Nai Nonla that their troops would pull five miles away from the village market. Rival guerillas were still facing each other at the pass last week. Observers said the continuing squabble had given the beleaguered Burmese government some welcome breathing space.



Karen rebel: Debilitated



Two striking features of the mail we have been receiving lately from Burmese around the world are the high career achievements of the writers and, often, their first-hand experience of some of the events and personalities that have shaped their country's present crisis. In a general sense these readers all say the same thing: Burma's system of government is a dismal failure, those responsible for maintaining the system are corrupt and ignorant, and total reform is no longer an option or ideal but the country's only chance of surviving in its present form. Frustratingly, the most useful insights and tidbits come from Burmese émigrés whose identities we cannot reveal. They want their "Name Withheld," for good reason, and since the significance

ASIAWEEK, SEPTEMBER 2, 1988

Burma's Fire 18

Replacing "Butcher" Sein Lwin with "Puppet" Maung Maung did not end Burma's street protests. The demand continued for full democracy.

Cover photo:
Alain Evrard — Asiaweek



VOL. 14 NO. 36 SEPTEMBER 2, 1988

CONTENTS

of certain repetitive letters lies in the identity of the writers, often we must regretfully decide against publishing them.

Sometimes, though, it seems impossible to let matters rest, especially when there is an opportunity to give you credible detail on one aspect or another. Recently, for example, we received a note from a long-time friend of Aung Gyi, the retired brigadier-general whose now-famous letters to Ne Win became the manifestos of the student rebellion. We asked this reader to tell us more, under promise of anonymity, and this is his reply:

"In the middle of 1987 both Aung Gyi and his wife Daw Mu Mu Thain fell ill and applied to go to Australia for treatment. In July, Aung Gyi was at the funeral of a former comrade when he was called to see Ne Win, who gave the couple permission to travel. Aung Gyi and his wife left Rangoon in August accompanied by his nephew Dr. Zaw Win Oo and a lady doctor.

"During their first night in Bangkok, Daw Mu Mu Thain found her husband sobbing. He did not sleep at all that night. This was his first trip abroad since serving in the caretaker government of 1958-60, when Thailand was way behind Burma economically and technologically, and now he was discovering how much the Thais had achieved while Burma had gone backwards. He was greatly saddened.

"From Bangkok they flew to Sydney, where they had medical treatment. They returned to Burma via Singapore and Malaysia. Throughout his travels, Aung Gyi observed the development of each country and enquired about its economic, social and political systems. He wrote at least two letters to Ne Win every week. He compared Burma's poverty to the development and prosperity of the countries he visited, and gave many suggestions for improvement. He said the families of soldiers going to frontline areas were so short of provisions that their wives had to become prostitutes. He anticipated severe shortages would occur three to four months after the harvesting of the padi in December, and said there would be riots then. He told Ne Win that germinating seeds would not be available for cultivation at the start of the monsoon in May 1988. He described numerous cases of corruption and pilferage, like the instance in which a Chinese ship's captain, carrying rice to China, found his cargo ten thousand tons short.

"Aung Gyi wrote about the shortage of everything. He told how the scarcity of paper had led people to collect and recycle used toilet paper. These letters to Ne Win were handed to Burmese diplomatic missions for dispatch to Rangoon. In conversation, Aung Gyi told us he felt that only Ne Win could change the system. He opposed the forceful overthrow of Ne Win and spoke of dissuading others from doing

ASIAWEEK, SEPTEMBER 2, 1988

LETTERS

All Change in Burma

To the editors of *Asiaweek*

After 26 years of mismanagement, corruption and tyranny by the Ne Win military dictatorship [EDITORIAL, Aug. 5], the Burmese people are more desperate than ever. Now is the time to explore ways of restoring democracy and prosperity — including suspension of U.S. military aid to the dictatorship, and sponsorship of a conference to bring the many dissident factions together and discuss a peaceful transition. Only when the military is removed from office can the people of Burma regain any hope of peace and prosperity.

ZALI WIN
Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A.

■ An interim council of state containing civilians acceptable to students, the general populace, the National Democratic Front and exiles should take the reins of administration while preparations for elections to the National Assembly, which should be held in six months, are being made. A constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution along federal republican lines should complete its task in a year. Political prisoners must be freed immediately and families of those massacred by the military must be compensated. The Burma Socialist Program Party must be disbanded. A truce in the 40-year-old war against ethnic minorities must be declared and a U.N. peacekeeping force asked to supervise it.

Ne Win may not have played his final note. One hopes that, to defuse the situation, a neighbouring country will come to Burma's aid by offering an unpopulated island where Ne Win can savour his favourite nasi goreng and see his final sunset. He should take along his golf clubs and cronies.

Nothing less than a return to the democratic form of government, with all the peoples of Burma participating fully, will stop the revolution now. The tragedy is that it has cost many lives for

Write **Letters Dept.**, *Asiaweek*, 22 Westlands Road, Hongkong. All letters intended for publication must include the writer's name & address, though names will be withheld when necessary. Letters are subject to editing as clarity and space require.

the world to notice the situation that has been brewing for 26 years.

UKYAW WIN
Laguna Hills, California, U.S.A.

The Old Indochina Song

Contrary to what the gentleman in Hanoi says [LETTERS, July 22], the term "Federation of Indochina" was first used by the Vietnamese themselves to show they intended to step into the shoes of the French colonialists. Laos docilely submitted as its leaders were personally related in one way or another to the Vietnamese hegemonists. Things went awry in Cambodia when the Chinese saw Vietnam joining Comecon and signing a long-term treaty with the Soviet Union involving facilities at Da Nang and Cam Ranh Bay.

Reunified Vietnam's leaders went even further than their pipe dream by toying with the idea of detaching sixteen northeast Thailand provinces and joining them with Laos. They even initiated a "liberation movement" (expounded to a former prime minister of France). As for the trilogy "Sovereignty, Neutrality and Cooperation," Mr. "Name Withheld" should know this is borrowed from ASEAN — the proposed Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality.

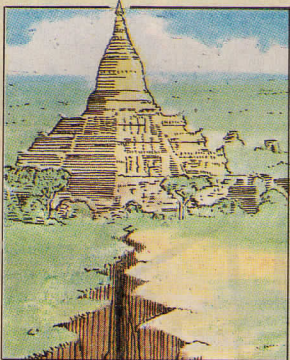
SUKHUM PHONGSATHORN
Bangkok, Thailand

Just Coalescence

You claim that I now say the Partido Demokratiko Pilipino will join with Senate President Jovito Salonga's Liberal Party to create a larger independent party not necessarily supportive of President Corazon C. Aquino [PASSAGE, Aug. 12].

It is true that our party has coalesced with the Liberal Party headed by Senate President Salonga and with Secretary of Foreign Affairs Raul Manglapus's National Union of Christian Democrats. But it is not true that our coalition is "not necessarily supportive of President Aquino." In fact, the first article of faith of our coalition is to support President Aquino and her government.

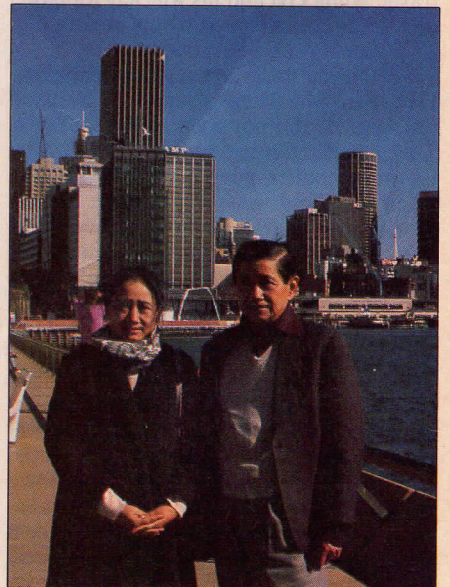
AQUILINO Q. PIMENTEL, JR.
Senate of the Philippines
Manila, Philippines



Asiaweek Drawing

so. He wanted to awaken Ne Win's conscience and purify the political system. He regretted that the people around Ne Win had kept Ne Win misinformed about the situation and were only furthering their personal ambitions.

"Daw Khin Kyi is the widow of Bogyoke Aung San, the founding father of independent Burma. She had been ambassador to India, and lived alone in Rangoon on a small pension. Because her sight was failing, she was admitted to the Eye Hospital in Rangoon last year. Aung Gyi saw her and was saddened by her sorry state. He went to see President San Yu but was refused entry and had to leave a letter. Eventually senior officials from the Health Ministry went to see her. They could not find her at first. She had been shunted into a side room because 'some VIPs are



Asiaweek Pictures

Aung Gyi & his wife in Sydney, 1987

visiting"! Later, Daw Khin Kyi was allowed to go abroad for treatment."

Aung Gyi, reports our confidant, "was surprised by the economic development of Malaysia, which had gained independence from the British nine years after Burma. He noted that in Malaysia people now had 'one house, one car,' which had been an objective of U Nu's parliamentary democracy. He found that the rice used for animal feed in Malaysia was of better quality than the rice distributed for human consumption in Burma, and he wrote to Ne Win about that. He told his nephew to take a bag each of 'human rice' and 'dog rice' to Foreign Minister Ye Goung for delivery to Ne Win."

Not surprisingly, perhaps, Dr. Zaw Win Oo is now in custody with Aung Gyi. Like many readers, we hope they will soon taste good rice again. ■